

To What We Might Do by MacksDramaticShenanigans

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Summary:

He looks scared. More scared than Eddie's ever seen him before. He looks nervous, too, and Eddie didn't think it was even possible for Richie Tozier to get nervous.

But there he is. Looking like he's going to shit his pants or throw up all over himself. Eddie would be more worried about that if he still thought Richie was drunk.

He watches as Richie twists his fingers together in front of him, picking at his cuticles and nails, curling and uncurling them into his palms, leaving little half-moon crescents each time he does.

Eddie stifles the urge to reach over and still Richie's hands. He thinks the touch might spook him.

"Eddie, I'm..." and Richie stops there. He looks pained. His lips are still parted, like he wants to finish his sentence but the words are stuck. Like they're lodged in the back of his throat and he can't get

them out no matter how hard he tries.

Before Eddie can reassure him that it's okay to take his time, that he'll still be here listening, Richie moves so suddenly he's nothing but a blur.

To What We Might Do

Author's Note:

Hi friends!! I'm back with another reddie fic!! Against my own better judgement, if we're being honest. AndI say that because the other day I saw that there's going to be a reddie big bang, and I would love to sign up for it, but I'm not going to unless I have a solid idea and, ideally, have started writing it already— which was not the case. But then this fic ended up being sooo much longer than I anticipated, like seriously, there was a time when I was like oh lol this is probably barely going to make it to 3k! Jokes on me, though, here we are at almost 10k! But anyways, the minimum for the bang is 10k, and like, wow this fic is almost 10k! So like I totally could save it for the bang, be finished with the fic minus a couple hundred words and some editing, and that would be a walk in the park! But. I am impatient. So so impatient. And I don't think I can sit on this until April, I just can't. I've already been sitting on it for like 2 days and that was unbearable lmao.

So, yes. I've decide to just post this, and if I can come up with something for the bang later on, then that's great. If I can't, oh well.

Anyways, this fic all started with me deciding hey, you know what would be great? if you totally projected onto Richie, yeah, that would be awesome, lets do it! And here we are lol. LikeI said, I had no idea this was ever going to end up being this long, but honestly, I really really love that it did. I couldn't for the life of me figure out how I wanted to end it, so I kind of just kept adding stuff and adding stuff lol. So my inability to decide is what you have to thank for the length, I suppose.

I'm super super happy with how this one turned out, I don't think I've felt like this solidly good about an entire fic in a while. I always find something to nitpick about when rereading my own work before posting lol, but this one I was just really overall happy with. Tbh, it might be my favorite reddie thing I've written so far... maybe.

I really hope that you guys love it as much as I do! Please please let me know what you think of it, your feedback is my driving force!!

This is unbetaed, as usual lol. All mistakes are my own, so please forgive me if there are any.

The title comes from [Keeping A Secret](#) by Bleachers. This song just really really fit this fic so well, I couldn't have found a better song for it, tbh. Also I love Bleachers so.

Now, without further ado, please enjoy!!

Eddie doesn't like parties. He doesn't like how loud the music is (and how terrible it always is, too), how close the people are, how overwhelmingly strong the smells are (alcohol and vomit are already disgusting on their own, but mixed together? Good god, Eddie needs a fucking nose plug). Parties are just one big cesspool of bacteria and discomfort, and Eddie does not like them.

But that doesn't mean he doesn't go to them. He puts up a fight, but he lets his friends drag him out to one every so often, mostly because he's afraid that if he doesn't go he won't have a social life. It'd be very easy for him to stay holed up in the safety of his clean room, all alone with nothing but his laptop and antiseptic wipes to keep him company.

It's a sad thought, but it's true.

Which is why he finds himself in the living room of the house of someone he doesn't know, pushing his way through the sweaty bodies grinding up against each other, dodging poorly dyed hair whipping around and swinging into his face, and drinks haphazardly sloshing over the side and spilling to the floor as he desperately searches for the nearest exit.

Eddie would say he doesn't know how Bill managed to talk him into attending a *frat party*, of all kinds of parties, but that would be a lie. He knows exactly how Bill sold him on it. All he had to do was not-so-casually mention that Richie would be there, and that was enough to have Eddie's rant listing the reasons why frat parties are the worst and he refuses to ever attend one all but die on his lips.

(“Well, I’ve never actually been to a frat party,” Eddie said slowly, pursing his lips thoughtfully. Trying to make it as unobvious as possible as to why he was suddenly changing his mind. “I probably should go to one before my college career ends. That’s like... that’s like a rite of passage or something. Like did you really go to college if you’ve never seen the inside of a frat house?” He laughed awkwardly. “I should probably, y’know, make sure people aren’t lying about... about how gross they are... make sure it’s not just some elaborate plan to keep the losers out or something.” He glanced towards Bill, who was listening to Eddie’s ramblings with an amused sort of patience. Almost like he knew exactly what he was doing by dropping that tidbit of information. Fucking Bill.

“Try everything once, right?” Eddie finished weakly.

Bill just nodded wordlessly, but the look on his face did all the speaking for him.)

Eddie isn’t proud of how pathetically quick his mind had changed all because of a boy .

Bill had smirked knowingly at Eddie and told him he’d pick him up at nine.

Except now, Bill is nowhere to be found. Eddie thinks he might have seen him with Audra earlier, sneaking off down the hall to find somewhere quiet. Probably to make out. Bill’s been trying to get with her for weeks now, ever since Bev told him that his attraction wasn’t

so one-sided. It was only a matter of time, really.

Finally Eddie breaks through the crowd of bodies, nearly tripping over the threshold of the door as he spills out into the cool evening air.

He lets out a huffy breath and pushes his hair back off of his forehead, casting a glare over his shoulder at the inside of the house. Ugh. He needs a shower.

Eddie's gotten a lot better about dealing with his cleanliness *issues* since childhood— his mom had fucked him up real bad back then—and he's definitely made a lot of progress by putting himself into situations that are far, far outside of his comfort zone, like tonight, but there's only so much of it he can take at a time, and he's coming dangerously close to exceeding that threshold right now. He's not sure how much more of this party he can take.

The back porch is, blissfully, empty. Except for the fact that it's *not*, he realizes as he spots someone else.

A single figure sits at the bottom of the back porch steps, elbow propping himself up on the step just above his, long legs stretched out in front of him. And Eddie would recognize that mop of messy curls anywhere.

Richie.

He's surprised to see him out here, alone. Usually he's at the center of all the action, the eye of the tornado. Now, he's unusually quiet, subdued in a way Eddie has rarely ever seen him. It's a little unnerving.

Eddie descends two steps, quiet and off to the side so as to not disturb Richie. He can see the red solo cup Richie's been glued to all night in his hand, but it looks nearly empty if the haphazard way it's dangling in his grip says anything. Though, he'd been pretty fucking drunk inside, so maybe that's more of a reflection of that than anything else.

He feels a bit like a creep, watching Richie like this, without him

knowing he's there. Eddie decides to change that and shuffles forward, loud enough to announce his presence without having to actually announce it. When he reaches the bottom step, he lowers himself down next to Richie.

"Hey," he greets, and he catches the somber expression covering Richie's face before he lifts his head and pastes on a too bright grin at the sight of Eddie.

"Eds," Richie says, voice animated like he's happy to see Eddie. "Enjoying the party?"

Eddie makes a face. His lip curls back in disgust. "Not really," he answers honestly. "Why the fuck are frat houses so gross?"

Richie snorts a laugh. "Helps hide evidence of all the illegal shit they get up to in here," he jokes, though he's probably not very far off from the truth. There's probably enough shady shit going on at this party alone to open an investigation.

Eddie makes a noise in agreement before turning the question back on Richie. "What about you? Are you having any fun?" He asks, nudging Richie's shoulder with his own.

"It's a frat party," Richie responds, and it's not really an answer, but Eddie thinks he gets it anyways.

"You sobered up fast," Eddie comments. It's surprising. He doesn't know much about how long that usually takes, but he'd seen Richie knock back enough alcohol all night to know that him being this coherent right now doesn't fit.

Richie laughs and tips his cup towards himself, peering down into it. He gives it a shake and watches the liquid swirl around inside. "I, uh, I wasn't actually drunk?" He admits, voice lilting up at the end like he's asking Eddie rather than telling him.

Eddie blinks. "What?" He asks. "Dude, you were downing drinks like crazy all night. I saw you. You went into the kitchen for a refill like ten times, man."

Richie chuckles again. "Yeah, that was just water. I'm hydrated as

fuck right now.” He thrusts the cup towards Eddie.

Eddie hesitates, then peers into it. He scrunches his nose up and points down at the little liquid left. “It’s clear. How do I know that’s not vodka?”

Richie snorts and shoves the cup closer towards Eddie, holding it out for him to take. “If you don’t believe me, see for yourself.”

Eddie doesn’t take it. Just stares at it questioningly.

When Eddie continues to stare at it and not do anything else, Richie gives it another shake and pushes it into Eddie’s hand. “Don’t trust me?” He asks, corners of his lips tilting up. “Sniff it.”

And the thing is Eddie *does*. Trust him. He always has. He frowns and takes the cup from Richie. He brings it up to his nose and takes the tiniest of sniffs. The strong stench of alcohol isn’t there; it smells like... nothing. So Eddie holds it to his lips, slowly tilts it back to take a sip, and oh. It *is* water.

Confusion floods Eddie’s head. “But you were slurring... and... and... you were tripping everywhere... and...”

Richie takes the cup again and knocks the rest back before setting it on the ground beside him. “That was just an act,” he tells him. “It’s not hard to act shitfaced. I’m clumsy as fuck already, so stumbling isn’t hard. I really did trip over someone’s shoe at one point, though. Who the fuck leaves a shoe in the middle of the floor?” Richie shakes his head. “And the slurring... s’just another impression. Just another voice to master.” He shrugs and casts his eyes down again. “Most people are too fucked up to notice it’s not genuine, anyways.”

“Oh,” Eddie says dumbly, and a silence settles between them as he processes.

Richie is faking it. Faking being drunk. Does that mean he’s faking having a good time, too? And that’s... that’s kind of sad. He shouldn’t have to feel like he needs to fake it. Why was he faking it?

Eddie frowns down at his shoes. He should’ve noticed. He wasn’t drunk either. He should have realized it wasn’t real. He could’ve

made sure Richie was enjoying himself. Could have kept him company so he wasn't lonely. His stomach twists guiltily.

"Why?" He suddenly asks, breaking the silence.

"Huh?"

"Why were you faking being drunk?"

"Oh. Funny story," Richie starts, and Eddie can tell it isn't going to be a funny story. "I, uh, I've never actually been drunk. Don't like drinking." He pauses for a second, stares down at his shoes, picks at a loose thread hanging from the end of his shirt. "I, um. I'm afraid if I drink too much I won't be able to shut up."

Eddie snorts. "You don't need too much alcohol for that, Rich, you already never shut up."

But Richie doesn't laugh, and the smile falls off of Eddie's face.

Richie looks so serious right now. He hasn't even cracked a joke the entire conversation, something that rarely ever happens. It's starting to worry Eddie. Something is clearly bothering Richie, and Eddie doesn't know how to help him.

"I just. Everyone always says you're honest when you're drunk. That alcohol loosens your tongue, or whatever. And I... I have secrets." Richie lets out a shuddery breath, and his voice gets smaller. "I'm scared they'll all spill out if I get too drunk. So I just... don't."

Secrets. Oh.

Eddie's heart twinges. It kind of hurts to hear that Richie's keeping secrets from him. He thought they were the kind of best friends that knew all there was to know about each other, that told each other everything, no matter how silly or dumb or weird it is; hell, Richie knows about the time Eddie was ten years old and wet his bed because of a nightmare about the Strawberry Shortcake character. He'd never told a single soul about it except for Richie, too embarrassed.

But, then again, maybe it's hypocritical of Eddie to have that

expectation, to be upset about that. If he wasn't already not a fan of drinking for various other reasons he'd feel the same way. He has secrets too. There are some things Eddie hasn't told Richie either, despite their promise. But some secrets are never meant to see the light of day, no matter how sincere a pinky promise to never keep things from each other is.

It hurts, but if Eddie's too chickenshit to lay his entire soul bare to Richie, he can't exactly blame Richie if he won't do the same. Whatever secrets he's keeping, they're important ones. Big ones. Scary ones.

"I get it," Eddie tells him, looking over at Richie.

Richie's eyes snap up to meet Eddie's, surprise shining in them. "You do?" He sounds like he doesn't quite believe him.

Eddie nods. And he thinks it's that small shred of doubt Richie's showing that makes him say it. "I have secrets too," he admits. It's the closest he's ever come to telling Richie how he feels about him. "We all do."

Richie's eyebrows lift and he sits up a little. Sucks in a breath. He's steeling himself for something.

He looks scared. More scared than Eddie's ever seen him before. He looks nervous, too, and Eddie didn't think it was even possible for Richie Tozier to get nervous.

But there he is. Looking like he's going to shit his pants or throw up all over himself. Eddie would be more worried about that if he still thought Richie was drunk.

He watches as Richie twists his fingers together in front of him, picking at his cuticles and nails, curling and uncurling them into his palms, leaving little half-moon crescents each time he does.

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"Eddie, I'm..." and Richie stops there. He looks pained. His lips are still parted, like he wants to finish his sentence but the words are

stuck. Like they're lodged in the back of his throat and he can't get them out no matter how hard he tries.

Before Eddie can reassure him that it's okay to take his time, that he'll still be here listening, Richie moves so suddenly he's nothing but a blur.

At first Eddie thinks he's leaving, that he's *fleeing*, but he realizes a second too late that Richie's really *getting closer*. And then there's a clammy hand on his cheek and a chapped pair of lips on his own.

Eddie freezes. *Richie is kissing him*.

But then it's over just as quickly as it began. Richie wrenches himself away. He's on his feet in an instant, staggering back.

"Fuck. Shit, fuck. That wasn't supposed to happen. I... fuck. Shit. I should've just gotten fucking drunk. It wouldn't have made a fucking difference," Richie curses, pulling his glasses off and scrubbing his hands over his face as he paces back and forth in front of Eddie.

Eddie, who's still so shocked by what just happened that he hasn't said anything, hasn't even moved. His mind is reeling, as he sits there dazed and confused, trying to analyze and understand what the fuck just happened.

Richie's pacing comes to a screeching halt a second later, his shoes stopping just in front of Eddie, right in his line of vision where he's staring hard at the concrete. "Eds?" Richie asks. He sounds nervous, even more than before, and *fuck*. How is that even possible?

Eddie wants to respond, wants to say something, *anything*, but the problem is he *doesn't know what to fucking say*. His lips part, but no words come out. He can't even look up at Richie.

So many questions flood his brain. Was that Richie's way of coming out? Was that his *secret*? Was he too afraid to say the words 'I'm gay' that he felt like *showing* Eddie would be easier? Or was it a double whammy, a kill two birds with one stone kind of deal? Come out and tell Eddie how he feels about him? Did that mean that he... does he *like* Eddie? Is that even possible?

A choked off, half-laugh, half-sob echoes out between them, and it's what finally makes Eddie snap out of his shock and look up. Except by the time he does, Richie isn't in front of him anymore. He's halfway across the lawn, moving quicker than Eddie's ever seen him move before. He almost trips over a stray sprinkler head in his haste.

Eddie finally jumps to his feet. "Richie!" He calls after him, but Richie doesn't turn around. Doesn't even acknowledge that he heard Eddie. "Richie!"

Richie turns the corner, and Eddie finally kicks himself into gear, hurrying in the same direction, desperately hoping it's not too late to catch Richie. Except when he rounds the corner, he's met with a throng of people and no sign of Richie in the crowd.

"Fuck," Eddie mutters, running a hand through his hair, tugging lightly on the ends. A stress habit.

Eddie pulls out his phone. He tries to call Richie, but it rings out before going straight to voicemail. He dials twice more, only to get the same result. Cursing again, Eddie opens up his message thread with Richie and shoots off five texts in a row.

richie.

richie where are you?

please pick up your phone

please

richie?

Eddie turns the volume on his phone all the way up and heads back inside to look for Bill.

He finds him in the kitchen, thank goodness, with Beverly and Mike.

"Eddie! Where've you been?" Bill calls, grinning wide at Eddie. He's standing in front of a bucket in the sink, filled with melting ice and probably lukewarm beer. Bill pulls two bottles out and holds one out towards Eddie. "Do you w-want some beer?"

Eddie shakes his head, frown still sitting deep against his mouth. He keeps looking past his friends, scanning the room for any sign of Richie.

Beverly's eyebrows pull together in concern, and she reaches out to touch Eddie's arm. "Hey, what's wrong? Did something happen?"

Eddie's jaw clenches, but he nods. "I can't find Richie," he tells her but doesn't explain any further. "Have any of you seen him?"

Bill and Beverly shake their heads, but Mike jerks a thumb over his shoulder in the general direction of the front door. "You just missed him, I think he might have left," he says. "I saw him talking with Stan not too long ago before he went out front."

"Shit," Eddie mumbles. He pulls his phone out of his pocket again and checks the screen. Nothing. "Do you think he went home?" He asks, glancing between his friends.

Mike shrugs. "He might have, but I really can't say."

"Eddie, hon, what happened?" Beverly asks, setting her drink down behind her.

Eddie just shakes his head again. "I think I'm gonna go try to find him. I'm gonna head out," he says, then turns to Bill. "Sorry I'm bailing on you early."

Bill frowns and reaches out to squeeze Eddie's shoulder. "D-don't worry about it, Eddie," he says. "Just let me know yuh-you made it back okay. And if you find R-Richie."

"I will," Eddie promises, already stepping away from the group.

"Let us know when everything's okay!" Beverly shouts after him.

Eddie throws a thumbs up over his shoulder and disappears into the crowd in the direction of the front door.

Richie is not at his and Bill's room. He's not anywhere else in the

dorm either; not the common area, not the laundry room, not the study lounge. He's not tucked away in his usual corner of his favorite twenty-four hour campus coffee shop either. Nor is he next door at the student store buying a can of red bull to add to whatever sugary caffeinated confection he's purchased, the way Eddie always chastises him over. A stop by Mike and Ben's dorm yields no answers, either; Ben hasn't seen him all night. Richie isn't in the quad either. Or behind the overgrown bushes surrounding the gazebo, where he and Beverly go to smoke sometimes. He isn't at the football field. Or the soccer field. Or the baseball field.

Eddie can't find him anywhere on campus. And he doesn't have a car to go searching through the city, and he hates using public transportation this late at night. Especially alone.

Richie still isn't answering his texts or calls—Eddie's almost positive he shut his phone off completely since it doesn't even ring anymore before sending him straight to voicemail.

He leaves one last message for Richie, pleading for him to at least let Eddie know that wherever he is, he's safe.

Then he gives up. It's clear that Richie doesn't want to be found, not tonight anyways. It's probably best if Eddie gives him that space he so evidently wants, then he'll try again tomorrow.

It's nearing two in the morning by the time Eddie makes it back to his own dorm and trudges up the stairs to his floor. Stan isn't in when he gets to their room, and Eddie thinks he may have decided to crash at Bill's or Mike's room tonight after the party.

Eddie doesn't feel tired, and even after he takes a hot shower and puts on his pajamas and slides into bed, he's still not tired. He lies on his back, hands folded against his stomach, but he doesn't close his eyes. His mind buzzes. His lips tingle with a phantom kiss. That moment replays in his head, over and over, and his breath catches each time. Fingers trail up to ghost over his lips. His heart hammers away in his chest, too loud in the otherwise silent room.

He resigns himself to a sleepless night, and stares up at the ceiling questions upon questions plaguing him. There's so many, too many,

but one that stands out, more important than the rest:

What does it mean? What does it mean? What does it mean?

Sunday brings even less luck than the previous night. Eddie *still* can't find Richie, and he's *still* not answering his phone. It doesn't go straight to voicemail anymore, but Richie never picks it up. Eddie retraces his steps from last night, checking all the same spots on campus. Again, no sign of Richie.

None of the other Losers have heard from him either, or so they say. Bill said Richie never came back to their room last night, but Beverly was uncharacteristically quiet during the conversation, her usual concern for her friends nowhere near its normal levels.

It both worries Eddie and placates him; he knows that if Beverly isn't vocalizing her concern for Richie's wellbeing, then it must mean he's okay. She would never just sit by passively when one of their own was missing; hell, she'd be the first in line after Eddie to start a search party. But, that doesn't erase the fact that Eddie's still in the dark about everything, and that isn't ever a good feeling. Especially since he's just as disconcerted as Richie must be, maybe even moreso.

Eddie won't lie and say it doesn't sting.

That night before bed, his phone lights up with a new message, and Eddie practically jumps on it in his haste to see who it's from.

i'm alive

It's from Richie, and that's all it says. It's clear that the only reason he sent the message was because someone else must have told him how badly Eddie was freaking out over his disappearance. There's no explanation, no answers, just two words that should make Eddie feel better, but instead just make him upset.

When he responds, Richie doesn't send anything else.

Richie doesn't show up in class the next few days either, and by Wednesday, Eddie is thoroughly fed up. He hasn't been sleeping very well since the party, and every time he asks his friends about it, they all answer with that same unknowing response, but Eddie can tell there's something they aren't telling him.

What happened between him and Richie at the party continues to trouble him, the confusion only growing with each passing day he doesn't get an explanation. Truth be told, it's starting to piss him off a little.

Where does Richie get off just kissing him like that and then disappearing into the ether? Why the fuck would he do that? Was it just some kind of joke? Did he... did he find out about Eddie's feelings and this was his way of telling him to fuck off? Eddie doesn't want to think any of that is true, but at this point, he doesn't really know what to think anymore. He thought they were supposed to be best friends; best friends don't disappear on each other like this.

Eddie barely makes it through his last class of the day, and he's up and out the door as soon as his professor lets them go. He speed walks back to his dorm, hoping Stan's back from his club meeting so they can talk. He has a feeling Stan knows more than he's letting on; after all, he and Richie have known each other longest, if anyone else would know what's going on with him, it's Stan.

Or maybe Beverly. They're pretty close, too. If Stan doesn't know anything, Eddie vows to try Beverly next.

Eddie jiggles his key into the lock and turns, shoving his shoulder into the heavy door as he does so. The lights are on in the room, and he's happy to see Stan sitting at his desk, bent over a notebook, scribbling away.

"Stan," Eddie calls, hooking his key onto the pushpin near the door. He tosses his backpack onto his side of the room before shuffling over to Stan's desk. "Stan," he repeats. "Stan, Stan, Stan."

"Eddie. Eddie, Eddie, Eddie," Stan mimics, tearing his attention from his assignment. He sets his pen down and shifts in his seat to face Eddie.

"Stan, have you seen Richie?" Eddie questions. "I haven't seen him since he— since the party on Saturday. I really need to talk to him."

Something almost pained flashes across Stan's face, and he averts his eyes briefly. It strikes Eddie as very... guilty. "Uh, yes. I have seen him—"

"You have!" Eddie interrupts, eyebrows flying up. He desperately wants to berate Stan for not telling him sooner, but that's not important right now. "Where is he? I need to talk to him. It's important!"

Stan presses his lips together, and Eddie waves a hand at him in a silent *get on with it*. "He's pretty... bad, Eddie," Stan says, and Eddie deflates. Stan sighs and continues. "Sick, I mean," he corrects. "Uh, really sick. He said he thinks he's contagious. He doesn't want to risk getting anyone else sick so he's stayed... away. It's pretty bad."

Eddie frowns. "It's important," he says softly. And it *is*. So much so that Eddie's seriously contemplating busting into Richie's room anyways, germs be damned. Then Stan's words catch up to him. "Hang on, he let *you* see him," he points out. "If he's contagious why would he let *you* see him? You're not sick now, are you?"

Stan looks panicked for a moment before he gives up and shrugs. "It's pretty bad," he repeats. "Or so he says." And there's something in his voice telling Eddie maybe he's not telling the entire truth here. Like maybe Richie isn't actually "sick" and he's just using that of all things as an excuse because he knows it'll deter Eddie. Which is very on par with Richie.

But also totally fucked. And there's no way Eddie's going to let it work.

"Thanks, Stan," Eddie says, turning away from Stan's desk so he can rush back towards the door. He snatches his key from the hook and shoulders the door open.

"Wait, where are you going?" Stan calls.

Eddie's already got one foot out the door. "I told you, I need to see

Richie,” he yells over his shoulder, then lets go of the door. “Don’t wait up!” He adds, though he’s already halfway down the hall.

Richie doesn’t live in the same dorm as Eddie, but his building is just behind Eddie’s, connected by a hallway. He’s been there hundreds of times, he could find his way in his sleep, so it doesn’t take long for Eddie to storm down the stairs, through the connecting hallway, and up the stairs to Richie’s floor. He’s on the fifth floor up, and by the time Eddie pushes out of the stairwell his legs ache and his lungs burn, but the elevator would’ve taken too long. He stops for the briefest of minutes, takes a few puffs on his inhaler, then continues down Richie’s side of the hall until he’s standing right outside his and Bill’s door.

The whiteboard hanging next to the door has some stupid joke scrawled across the center and a few aimless doodles surrounding it, and Eddie knows that has to mean Richie’s inside; the joke had been different yesterday, and Richie’s the only one that cares enough to update it daily. Not to mention, he can see light coming from the crack at the bottom of the door, and the faint sound of music, too.

Eddie raises his fist to the door and pounds on it, hard and insistent, not letting up until he hears shuffling behind the door and it flies open.

“Bill, I swear to god, if you forgot your key again, you dumbass—” Richie cuts himself off as his eyes fall onto Eddie, not Bill. They go wide behind his glasses before the door comes rushing towards Eddie.

But before it can shut all the way, Eddie sticks his foot out, catching it. The door slams into his toes, hard, and he hisses out in pain, but doesn’t budge. “Ow, you fucker, let me in.”

Richie opens his mouth, but nothing comes out.

Eddie would laugh that he finally found a way to render Richie fucking Tozier speechless, but he doesn’t really find it funny at all. It only grates on him even more.

When Richie doesn't move, Eddie takes it upon himself to push his way into the room, shoving past Richie.

It's enough to jar Richie out of his shock. "What the fuck are you doing here?" He blurts.

Eddie laughs humorlessly. "Where the fuck have you been?" He asks instead of answering Richie. "I haven't heard from you in, like, five fucking days, Rich. You just fucking *ran away*, and then started ignoring me on top of that! And I know that's what you're doing and that it's only me you're doing it to, because everyone seems to know what the fuck is going on except for me! What did I do?" Eddie throws his hands up. He feels borderline hysterical, a little bit like he could cry. Which he so doesn't want to do. But he's so frustrated and sick of not knowing why. "I'm being serious here, Richie, I don't know what I fucking did. I mean, you're the one... *you kissed me!*" He shouts, and Richie's eyes widen again, like he didn't expect that to be brought up. "You didn't even give me a chance to say anything on Saturday. You bolted before I could!"

Richie bites his lip and shakes his head. "You were just. Frozen. You weren't moving or saying anything. I mean, jesus, Eds— *Eddie*. I thought I broke you for a second there." He looks uncomfortable about what he says next, fidgeting in place as he admits, "and I was... I was embarrassed and mad at myself because I just," he lets out a hysterical laugh, "I just fucked everything up. And I did! I mean, look at you! You're mad! You came all the way over here to yell at me, and—"

"I didn't come over here to yell at you," Eddie interrupts. But that isn't entirely true. And Richie must see that, too. "Okay, so maybe I did. But... but I don't think it's out of line," he says, jutting his chin out defensively. "I mean, what the fuck, Richie. You don't just get to kiss me and then *leave* and disappear without an explanation!"

Richie winces, ducking his head a little. Eddie continues on.

"Do you know that's all I've been able to think about for five days now? I can't sleep. I think I bombed my anatomy test because I was so preoccupied thinking about it. I almost walked into a fucking lamppost, too. And my psychology professor asked me a question and

I almost embarrassed myself in front of the entire fucking class by blurting out your name, and you *clearly* weren't the one to come up with fucking classical conditioning. All I can think about is what you did on Saturday and what it fucking means." He starts to mimic his own brain. "Why did Richie kiss me? Does Richie like me? I didn't even know Richie swung my way. Does that mean Richie found out that I've been in love with him since, like, the third fucking grade? Why the fuck did Richie run? Why does—"

"What?" Richie blurts, eyes wild, mouth hanging open unattractively.
"What the fuck did you just say?"

Eddie shuts his mouth abruptly. Swallows. Blinks. Shifts his eyes to the ground. He did not mean to say that. "Uh."

"What the fuck did you just say?" Richie repeats, but he doesn't sound angry. Not like Eddie initially thought. He sounds... surprised. Desperate, even. Like maybe he isn't quite sure he heard Eddie right. Like maybe he's trying not to get his hopes up, except it's too late for that because they're already up. They've been up.

"Uh. Why the fuck did you run?" Eddie squeaks.

Richie takes a small step forward and shakes his head. "No, before that. What did you say before that?"

Eddie swallows. His eyes flicker up to Richie's face, then back to the floor, and up to Richie's face again. His palms feel a little sweaty, stomach twisting nervously—which, he knows is so stupid, but he can't help it. "I, um, I said I'vebeeninlovewithyousincethethirdgrade," he rushes out all at once.

Everything in him desperately wants to look away, but Eddie forces himself to keep the eye contact, to be brave, and boy is he glad he did.

Richie *lights up like the fucking sun*. His eyes shine, and his lips stretch so wide it looks like it might hurt a little. He looks... *happy*, thrilled even. But then he opens his mouth. "Since the third grade?" He repeats, excited.

Eddie deflates. *Oh .* Here it comes. The teasing. “Richie,” he warns. “Don’t, *please .*” And suddenly Eddie’s eyes prickle around the edges and his nostrils flare a little as he tries to fight the urge to cry for the second time in minutes. That sliver of bravery and the confidence that came with it trickle out slowly, like a leak in a balloon. His shoulders slump and he clenches his jaw tightly.

Richie hasn’t caught on yet, and Eddie isn’t sure if he’s more grateful or upset about that. He stands there in front of Eddie, bouncing on the balls of his feet, giggling like a giddy child. He looks like the cat that got the cream, and all over the fact that he’s got some brand new, juicy good material to tease Eddie with.

“It’s not fucking funny, asshole,” Eddie bites out.

His tone catches Richie’s attention, and the laughter cuts off immediately. The smile slips from his face, too, as he finally realizes Eddie isn’t amused at all.

“Oh, shit, wait, what?” Richie asks, panicked. He steps closer to Eddie, reaching out to touch, but Eddie steps back. Richie frowns. “Eds?”

“Don’t call me that,” Eddie says icily.

“No, hey, wait, what’s wrong?” Richie questions, concern bunching his brows. “Talk to me, Eds,” he says, ignoring Eddie’s protests.

Eddie lets out a huff to disguise the hurt. “It’s not fucking funny,” he repeats. “I’ve been in love with you since the third fucking grade. So fucking what? It’s not... it’s not fucking funny, and I know that’s probably not something you want to hear, but—”

“Not something I want to hear, are you kidding?” Richie interrupts, but Eddie’s too caught up in his bruised feelings to catch the disbelief coloring Richie’s tone.

“—it’s fucking true, okay, so, like, I’m sorry, I guess. But also I’m not. And if you...” Eddie hiccups, seconds away from tears, but he forces himself to say it anyways. “If you don’t want to be around me anymore... just fucking... fucking rip the band aid off, okay?” He

sticks his chin out again and breathes heavily through his nose, trying not to sniffle. His lungs feel tight, but he doesn't want to pull his inhaler out now. He wants to— no, *needs* to look strong. "You don't need to pretend to like me just because we have the same friends. But you don't need to completely avoid me, I mean, jesus, we can be civil, can't we? We can—"

Richie blinks dumbly at Eddie, the corners of his lips pulled down. "Would you shut up for one second? First you don't say anything and now you won't let me get a word in edgewise!" He steps forward again, hands raised like he's trying to calm a startled animal. "Are you forgetting that *I* kissed *you* ? Not the other way around?" He asks.

Eddie gives a minute shake of his head. "No," he replies. "I know that. I remember, Richie. I just... I don't get why. Did you know? Was it... some kind of a joke to you? Some dumb bit you were trying out?"

Richie flinches back, a flash of hurt crossing his face. "Fuck no, Eddie. It wasn't a joke," he says, and it sounds so genuine. "And I didn't know. Honest. I had no idea. That you felt— *feel* that way, or that you're... that you're gay. I thought I was putting myself out on the line there."

Eddie purses his lips. He believes Richie, he does. He sounds so serious right now, and he wouldn't have seemed so hurt by an accusation like that if he wasn't telling the truth. But no matter, Eddie still can't wrap his head around it.

"Why'd you do it then?"

Richie sighs softly, and the corner of his mouth twitches up. "I have to spell it out for you, don't I?" He asks with a small laugh. Another step forward. He sticks a hand out and takes one of Eddie's, pressing their palms together. "Eddie," their eyes meet, "I love you. I'm in love with you, too," Richie says.

Eddie's heart skips so many beats that for a split second, he thinks he might be having a heart attack. But then a giddy laugh bubbles up and a smile pulls at his mouth. "I— really?" He asks, breathless.

Richie doesn't hold back, his own face one great big mushy mess of affection. He nods, and Eddie feels a little lightheaded having those giant heart eyes directed towards him like that. Wow, how had he not noticed those before?

"Yeah, numbnuts," Richie says, ever so eloquent. "That's the secret I was talking about that night. Well, that and the fact that I'm gay, too, but, like, that's kind of obvious given the whole being in love with you thing."

Eddie marvels. "Say that again," he requests.

Richie lifts an eyebrow. "I'm in love with you?"

Eddie nods and closes his eyes, letting the words wash over him. "Again."

Richie laughs and sways forward. "Eddie Spaghetti, I'm so in love with you," he says.

And Eddie doesn't even care that he used that ridiculous nickname; he's too fucking *happy*. Too over the moon. Too lost in feeling like he's walking on air. The smile that takes over Eddie's face is so big it feels like his face may crack in two, but he doesn't even care. A minute ago he didn't even think it was possible that Richie felt the same, and now here he is, saying it over and over and over. It's music to his ears.

When Eddie opens his eyes, he's met with Richie's beaming face mere inches from his own. His stomach flips happily as their eyes meet, and they grin dopily at each other for a few seconds before Richie opens his mouth to speak.

"So, like, does that mean we're boyf—"

Except just as Richie starts to ask, Eddie uses the grip Richie has on his hand to tug him in closer and surge forward just enough to close the short distance between them and seal their lips together. He has to lift up onto his tiptoes a little, and he drops Richie's hand so he can throw both of his around Richie's neck, clasping together against the nape.

This time it's Richie who's completely caught off guard by the sudden kiss, a surprised 'mphf' sort of noise slipping out. Unlike Eddie that first time, however, it only takes a few seconds before Richie registers what's happening and starts to kiss back.

Richie's hands curl around Eddie's waist, pressing flat against his back, holding him against his body.

His mouth is warm and wet and soft, and Eddie loses himself in the kiss. Lets his senses fill with *Richie, Richie, Richie*. Lets his smell, that goddamn ridiculous axe body spray, fill his nose, lets his taste wash over him, lets his touch leave sparks in its wake.

Eddie whines a little when Richie pulls back, not yet ready to call it quits on the kissing. Truth be told, he could kiss Richie all day. His body sways forward, still pursed lips chasing their match.

Richie chuckles softly and indulges Eddie in one, two, three more kisses, short and quick, square on his mouth, before peppering even more all across Eddie's face: his cheeks, his eyebrows, the tip of his nose.

"Cute, cute, cute," Richie cooes in between each kiss.

The dopey grin returns to Eddie's kiss-bruised lips, and he relishes in the moment.. Then he brings his hands down to Richie's chest, pushing at it a little. "Stop, stop!" He whines, but his giggles and the lack of real conviction behind his shoves say otherwise. He really loves it. He always has.

Finally Richie does stop, and he rests his forehead against Eddie's. The frames of his glasses bump into Eddie's face a little, and he grins lopsided at Eddie.

"So that's what it's like to kiss a responsive Eddie then, huh?" Richie teases. "Makes me think last time I was just kissing a statue."

Eddie rolls his eyes and fights off an embarrassed blush. "Shut up," he mumbles. "I wasn't expecting it last time. What would you do if the guy you've loved for, like, ever just up and planted one on you?"

Richie's mouth curves mischievously and he quirks an eyebrow. "You

mean like you just did?" He asks, snickering when Eddie's cheeks turn even redder when he realizes where Richie's going with this. "I'd say I'd kiss him back, I would," he adds in a truly awful British accent — or what's supposed to be one anyways. He's never been very good at the British guy no matter how much he practices.

Eddie scrunches up his nose and pushes at Richie's chest again, but not hard enough to separate them. "Don't be an asshole about it," he says. He softens, tilts his head curiously. "What made you do it, anyways?" He asks. "At the party. What made you kiss me?"

Richie presses his lips together then pushes them out as he ponders over his answer. "I think," he starts, leaning back. He takes one hand from Eddie's waist and brings it up to his hairline, brushing his fingers through the pristine waves. "I think it's because of what you said," he finally answers. Pauses. Takes a breath. Looks into Eddie's eyes. "You said that we all have secrets, and I think that was kind of, like, the final push, y'know? I realized that I didn't want to have any secrets from you, and that it was kind of stupid of me to be keeping this one from you of all people. You're my best friend, Eds. I have nothing to be afraid of with you."

Eddie's heart swells in his chest. "Not even Mrs. Cooper's yappy little Pomeranian?" He asks, calling back the time the two of them had walked past Richie's neighbor's yard only to have the tiniest little ball of fur bolt straight for them, barking her head off. The chain she'd been clipped to stopped her just before she could reach them, but Richie had let out a high-pitched yelp and jumped to Eddie's right side, using him as a buffer between himself and the dog. Eddie had teased him mercilessly for being afraid of a dog, and such a small, harmless one too. Richie had tried to explain that he wasn't *scared*, he just didn't want to get bitten *again*, but Eddie could see right through him. He'd only just resisted the urge to reach out and hold Richie's hand until he calmed back down that day.

Richie's mouth drops open and he points a threatening finger at Eddie. "You *fucker!*" He hisses. "That is so not fair, I was traumatized by that thing! And we agreed to *never* bring that up again!"

Eddie tips his head back as he cackles, and Richie starts to poke him in the side, right in his ticklish spot. He lets out a shriek and jumps

back, hands immediately flying out to grab at Richie's wrist. He catches both in his own, and quells Richie's wiggling fingers by threading his own through them.

Eddie steps back into Richie's space, and brings Richie's hands back around his waist before replacing his own around Richie's neck. He does nothing to mask the affection that softens his features and tilts his head a little to the side. "I feel the same way with you, Rich," he tells him, bringing the conversation back around. "You make me want to be brave. Like, all the time." He laughs, light and carefree. "Next time you see that dog I'll show her who's boss."

"My knight in shining armor, I'm swooning," Richie replies overdramatically, lifting the back of his hand to his forehead like a damsel in distress.

Eddie laughs along.

"Hey, you never answered my question before," Richie points out, perking up at the realization.

Eddie's brows furrow and he tries to think back to what question Richie's talking about. "Huh?"

"Yeah, you didn't even let me finish asking before you just shoved your face into mine," Richie says and laughs.

"To kiss you, asshole!" Eddie fires back. And that should be a perfectly good reason for not letting Richie finish asking his question, if you ask him. No reason to be complaining.

"It was *important*, though," Richie insists.

"Well what was it?" Eddie asks. "If it's so important quit beating around the bush and ask it."

Richie snickers and dips his chin to kiss Eddie's nose again. It scrunches up in response.

"Richie, ask your fucking ques—"

"*I was going to ask*," Richie interrupts. "Does all of this," he gestures

between himself and Eddie, then more broadly, “mean that we’re boyfriends now?”

“Oh,” Eddie breathes, and his stomach flutters. “Are you— is that your way of asking me?” He questions. “To be your boyfriend?”

Richie shrugs. “I guess it is,” he says and grins brightly.

Eddie rolls his eyes fondly. “Charming way of asking,” he says, but he doesn’t really care *how* Richie asks him, just that he *is* asking him. How fucking lucky is he? “I’d really like that, Rich,” Eddie tells him, smiling softly.

Richie preens at the answer, his own mouth taking on a gentle curve. The heart eyes return, even stronger than before, and Eddie can’t help himself. He bounces up onto his toes again and kisses his *boyfriend*.

When they part this time, Richie’s got a happy, dizzy sort of look on his face, and he squeezes Eddie’s waist. “We should celebrate,” he says, nodding. “We should go get drunk and celebrate.”

Eddie snorts. “I thought you didn’t like the idea of getting drunk,” he points out.

“See, but that was just when I was trying to hide my giant heart boner for you, Eds,” Richie replies.

Eddie splutters and shakes his head. “Oh my god, shut *up*. Heart boner, are you serious right now? Is it too late to change my mind?”

Richie laughs and pulls Eddie in even closer. He wraps his arms around him like an octopus and kisses his temple. “Absolutely. One hundred percent. No refunds, returns, or exchanges. You’re stuck with me, sweet cheeks.”

Eddie scrunches his nose at the nickname, but his heart skips anyways. “Do *not* call me that,” he says, but he’s laughing.

“Well what am I supposed to call you then?” Richie asks. He screws his face up into something more thoughtful. “Sweetheart? Baby? Light of my life, fire of my loins? My sun, my moon, and my stars?

Cupcake? *Snookums* ?”

“How about just Eddie,” Eddie suggests. Despite how awful some of those pet names Richie just listed are, truth be told, if Richie ever called him any of them, Eddie would still probably love it. Secretly, of course; he’d never give Richie the satisfaction of knowing he might like being called something like *snookums*.

“Spaghetti?” Richie asks, pretending to have heard wrong. “You got it.”

Eddie groans and lets his forehead thunk against Richie’s chest.

Richie laughs and rubs his hands down Eddie’s back. “I love you, Spaghetti. Now let’s celebrate.”

“I think,” Eddie starts, lifting his head and fixing heavy-lidded eyes onto Richie. He isn’t quite sure where this sudden confidence is coming from, but he likes the way Richie’s eyes suddenly glaze over at the sultry look on his face. “I know a better way we can celebrate.”

“Oh, *baby* !”

Eddie walks into the library and takes the stairs one at a time up to the third floor where the rest of the Losers will be. He finds them tucked away into their usual corner of the room, spread out across a large oak table. He’s not the last one there, but close to it. Richie’s the only one missing still.

Dropping his backpack onto the table, Eddie slides into one of the empty seats. “Hey guys,” he greets, unzipping his bag and starting to pull out his textbook and the bunch of flashcards he made for their study session.

“Hi Eddie,” Ben says, giving a little wave.

“Hey E-Eddie,” Bill adds.

“Eddie,” Mike greets, looking up from his notebook. “Hey, you never

let us know what happened the other night. Is everything okay? Did you ever find Richie?” he says.

“Find Richie where?” Richie asks, walking up to the table. “Making sweet sweet love to Eddie’s mom?” He thrusts his hips a few times, twisting his face up in a ridiculous overexaggeration of pleasure. “Oh yeah, guess Eds here doesn’t understand what a sock on the door means.” He shrugs. “M’afraid that’s not something you can just unsee so easily, poor Spaghetti. He’ll get over it.” Richie winks Eddie’s way.

Eddie scowls. “That’s so not funny, Rich.”

He dumps his own bag onto the floor at the seat next to Eddie’s, then bends down to press a wet, sloppy kiss to Eddie’s cheek.

The rest of the Losers don’t even bat an eye, Richie’s overly affectionate antics nothing out of the ordinary, especially with Eddie.

But Eddie blushes regardless and shoves at Richie, who slides into the seat next to him.

“So the two of you are talking again?” Beverly asks, setting her pencil down to survey the pair.

Richie grins big and drops his arm around Eddie’s shoulders. “Oh, we’re doing much more than just talking, Miss Marsh.” He winks.

Eddie elbows Richie in the ribs. “ *Richie* ,” he warns. His cheeks, already warm from Richie’s kiss, grow even hotter.

Mike raises an eyebrow, and Bill looks surprised for a second. The Losers take in the scene in front of them, and share a look with each other.

Eddie can tell they’re not sure if they’re being serious or if this is another one of Richie’s extended jokes.

Ben points between the two of them, voicing what everyone else is too unsure of. “Did you— are you— y’know ?” He trails off, waiting for Richie or Eddie to fill in the gaps.

“Madly in love? Going steady? Boinking?” Richie suggests. “Yes,

Benjamin, my good fellow, all of the above,” he says.

“B-boinking?” Bill laughs. He looks at both of them, curious at first, but then his eyes sparkle impishly.“Wait so you two have—”

“Yes,” Richie confirms, a proud look covering his face.

“ No ,” Eddie says, giving Richie a look.

“You don’t even know how he was going to finish that,” Richie points out.

Eddie presses his lips together. “I so do,” he replies. “And they so don’t need to know that.”

“Eds, babe, if I’m bumping uglies with the prettiest boy in all of Maine then I’m going to make sure everyone knows, that’s just a fact,” Richie says.

“Just Maine?” Eddie questions, a grin tugging at his lips. “Also, please, god, don’t call it ‘bumping uglies’, that’s just,” he shudders, “no.”

“What would you prefer I call it? *Making love* ? Smashing? Playing hide the—”

Eddie smacks his hand over Richie’s mouth. “For the love of god, do *not* finish that sentence or I *will* break up with you.”

Richie sticks his tongue out and licks Eddie’s palm.

“Asshole, *gross* !” Eddie cries, jerking his hand away. He wipes it across Richie’s shirt.

Richie catches his hand and brings it up to his lips, kissing the back of it to make up for it.

Beverly lights up across the table and leans forward. “You two *are* dating!” She cries happily, ignoring the bickering.

Richie and Eddie share a look, then turn towards Beverly and the rest of the Losers.

"Yeah," Eddie confirms, nodding. He's still red in the cheeks, but this time it's a happy flush, not an embarrassed one. "We are." He reaches over to take Richie's hand, twining their fingers on top of the table.

Richie grins triumphantly and bumps his shoulder into Eddie's. "Yeah, he *loves* me," he gloats, sounding more than pleased.

Eddie rolls his eyes fondly, but nods again. "I do," he says, unable to stop the words from coming out soft in an entirely too mushy kind of way. The overflowing affection makes him lean over and press a kiss to Richie's cheek. "And he loves me too," he adds.

This time Richie goes pink from the attention, a silly little smile spreading across his lips. "Sure do," he says, tilting his head to meet Eddie's eyes. His glasses skew to the side a little, but he doesn't bother fixing them.

The rest of the world fades away until it's just the two of them, and all Eddie can see is the adoration reflecting in Richie's eyes. The adoration that's directed all on *him*.

God, he's the luckiest person in the world. Who would have guessed a frat party could have led to this? Certainly not Eddie. But he sure is glad he decided to go. He's pretty sure he and Richie would have figured their shit out eventually, but it's nice knowing he doesn't have to wait for that to happen anymore. Knowing them that could have taken *years*.

"Oh, that's adorable," Beverly gushes. "I want someone to look at me like that," she says even softer.

"Do you think they remember we're still here?" Mike whispers.

"Leave them alone," Beverly tuts, laughing.

"I think it's romantic," Ben comments, pulling his eyes from Richie and Eddie to look at Beverly.

"I'm going to vomit," Stan adds, but he's grinning.

"G-get a room, you two!" Bill laughs.

Richie and Eddie simultaneously stick their middle fingers out at their friends.

"We can hear all of you, you know," Eddie points out, finally tearing his eyes from Richie.

"Yeah, and I'll show you getting a room, Billiam," Richie says before turning back towards Eddie and pouncing on him.

Eddie's eyes fly open and he barely has time to whisper shout Richie's name before he's tumbling off the edge of his seat. He and Richie hit the ground with a thud and a groan.

A few heads turn towards the noise. Someone shushes them.

"Ow," Eddie says, rubbing at his elbow where it smacked into the chair's leg on the way down.

"Shit, sorry, sorry," Richie apologizes from on top of Eddie. "I didn't know you weren't all the way in your seat!"

"Are you guys okay?" Ben's concerned voice calls.

Richie tosses a thumbs up straight into the air. "Just peachy, Haystack," he replies, but he doesn't move off of Eddie. He fixes mischievous eyes onto him and waggles his eyebrows. "Since we're already down here, wanna make out a little?"

Eddie snorts and pushes at Richie's chest so he'll roll off of him. "Let's get through this study session, then we can go home and do more than just make out," he promises, smirking at the way Richie perks up and his eyes go wide.

"Deal," Richie says, already clambering to his feet. He helps Eddie back up and they take their seats again.

Richie straightens his glasses, clasps his hands in front of him, and casts a glance around the table. Then he grins.

"So, are we gonna study or what?"

Author's Note:

Thank you so much for reading! Let me know what you think with a kudos and a comment!

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